DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 407 064 PS 025 049

AUTHOR Hobbs, Beverly B.; Chang, Joyce I.
TITLE What Are the School-Age Child Care Needs of Families in Rural Communities?
PUB DATE Nov 95
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the annual Conference of the National Council on Family Relations (Portland, OR, November 15-18, 1995).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *After School Programs; Children; Community Planning; Elementary Education; Family Day Care; Rural Environment; *Rural Family; *School Age Day Care
IDENTIFIERS *Child Care Needs

ABSTRACT

During 1994 and 1995, the Commissions on Children and Families in six rural Oregon counties joined with local elementary schools and the Oregon State University Extension Service to conduct surveys to determine the school-age child care needs of local families. Data were collected and analyzed, and individual reports were prepared by county. The present study used the aggregated data to gain a broader sense of how families in rural counties define their school-age child-care needs. Results identified the after-school arrangements used most often, problems encountered with child care; self-care topics that parents felt children needed more information on, and when parents felt care was needed. In addition, the survey data identified four major school-age child care issues: (1) the need for care; (2) the impact child care problems have on parents' job performance; (3) the need for affordable care, particularly for single-parent families and families with more than one child; and (4) quality of care. Older school-age youth and family day care providers were identified as two major sources of care but both groups need adequate training and support to ensure safe, quality care. The survey results also indicated that families' needs for school-age care vary, and thus, no single approach will meet the family's requirements and preferences. Based on the results, it was concluded that the needs for care are as relevant for families in rural communities as they are for families in heavily populated areas. (WJC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 407 064

What Are the School-Age Child Care Needs of Families in Rural Communities?

Beverly B. Hobbs
Oregon State University

Joyce I. Chang
Oregon State University

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Beverly B. Hobbs
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council on Family Relations
Portland, OR
November 15-18, 1995

PS 025049

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

During 1994 and 1995, the Commissions on Children and Families in six rural Oregon counties joined with local elementary schools and the Oregon State University Extension Service to conduct surveys to determine what the school-age child care needs were of local families. Data were collected and analyzed, and individual reports were prepared by county. The present study used the aggregated data to gain a broader sense of how families in rural counties define their school-age child care needs. Topics addressed include the kinds of care rural families use, problems families experience with care arrangements, and the times care is needed. Major school-age care issues are identified and implications for action are discussed.

What Are the School-Age Child Care Needs of Families in Rural Communities?

Six rural Oregon counties each conducted surveys to assess local needs for school-age child care. The findings were used by local county Commissions on Children and Families to help determine program and funding priorities. This study used the aggregated data to gain a broader sense of how families in rural counties define their school-age child care needs. Specifically, the study addressed the following questions: 1) Where do children spend their after-school hours?, 2) What problems do parents have with care arrangements?, 3) At what age do parents feel children can be left home alone after school?, 4) What educational information is needed by children in self-care?, and 5) How often and for what time periods do families need child care?

A Description of the Families

In each county, families with children in grades K-4 were asked to complete a questionnaire based on the care needs they had for their youngest, school-age child. Parents self-selected to participate, and a total of 3697 completed questionnaires formed the data base for the study. Seventy-nine percent of the families who responded were two-parent families, 21% were single-parent families. Place of residence was self-defined as in-town (59%) and out-of-town (41%). Single-parent families accounted for 26% of in-town families and 14% of out-of-town families. In terms of employment, defined as a minimum of ten hours per week, 57% of two-parent families had two or more adults employed, and 40% had only one adult employed. For single-parent households, 84% had one or more adults employed. Unemployment rates for two-parent and single-parent families were 3% and 16% respectively.

Results

After-School Care Arrangements

Families were asked to identify all care arrangements they used in a typical week (see Figure 1). The following were the five most frequently used types of care: at home with a parent (74%), at home with an older child (22%), at home with another adult (18%), at a relative's home (18%), and at family day care (18%). These five types of care held as most prevalent across family type and place of residence with only a few noted differences. Single-parent families (56%) were less apt to have a parent home after school than were two-parent families (78%), and in-town families used this type of care slightly less than out-of-town families. Single-parent families reported larger percentages of use of other adult-provided care, although their use of older children as care providers was comparable to that of all families and other subgroups. Families were least likely to place their children in child care centers (6%) or leave them home alone or with younger siblings (4%).

As noted above, the use of older children as caregivers was second only to care by parents. The age of these older children ranged from 7 to 17 years. In some instances, the child providing care was not much older than the child who was receiving care.

Forty-six percent of families (47% of two-parent and 43% of single-parent families) used just one type of care each week. In twenty-nine percent of families, the youngest school-age child went home to a parent every day. Twenty-five percent of all families reported using three or more types of care each week.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Problems with Child Care

Fifty-three percent of respondents indicated they experienced child care problems (see Figure 2). Finding care for a sick child topped the list of concerns (27%). Worrying about children while at work, coordinating child care with work hours, arranging transportation for children after school, and the cost of care were other identified problems. A comparison of data for two-parent and single-parent families revealed that although the two groups had similar concerns, single-parent families experienced more problems. Two thirds of single-parent families reported problems as opposed to half of two-parent families. A comparison of findings for in-town and out-of-town families indicated that in-town families reported slightly more child care problems. They were also more apt to worry about their children while at work and to experience problems with the cost of care.

Twenty-two percent of all families (28% single-parent, 20% two-parent) indicated that the lack of good child care kept them or their spouse from working as many hours as they would like.

Self-Care

On average, families indicated that children become capable of handling the responsibilities of being on their own after school each day at approximately twelve years of age. Recognizing, however, that younger children are sometimes left without adult supervision not only after school but at other times during the week, the survey asked families to identify self-care topics for which their children needed more information. All six of the topics listed on the questionnaire were identified by a majority of families (see Figure 3): applying first aid (79%), dealing with strangers at the door or on the phone (72%), knowing what to do in case of fire (69%), dealing with fear (62%), food safety (60%), and dealing with boredom/loneliness (59%). To address the need for this information, parents overwhelmingly indicated a preference for video taped information or for written materials they could use with their children at home. Classes taught by the school were also favored. Parents showed little interest in evening or weekend classes (see Figure 4). The data on self-care were consistent across subgroups.

When Care Is Needed

Sixty-five percent of families indicated some need for supervised school-age child care, projected need decreasing as the grade level of the child increased (See Figure 5). Single-parent families (76%) would be more likely to use care than would two-parent families (63%), as would families living in town (67%) as opposed to those living out of town (63%). Most families would be well served by programs that provided care as early as 6:00 a.m. and as late as 6:00 p.m., although there is some need for care that extends beyond these times.

Policy Implications

Issues

The survey data identified four major school-age child care issues. First, the need for care was substantiated. Only 29% of the children in the sample went home to a parent every day. Most families must find alternative after-school care arrangements. Second, the impact child care problems have on parents' job performance was underscored. Child care problems may limit the times and number of hours parents are able to work in addition to affecting their productivity on the job. A third issue that emerged was the need for affordable care, particularly for single-parent families and families with more than one child. The fourth issue revolved around quality of care. Older school-age youth

and family day care providers were identified as two major sources of care. Both groups need adequate training and support to ensure that safe, quality care is provided. Additionally, children who are left alone at any time need instruction in personal safety practices.

The survey results also indicated that families' needs for school-age care vary, and thus no single approach will meet each family's requirements and preferences. To create the needed alternatives for care, the resources of families, communities, and government must be called upon, and the policies that are developed must reflect the reality of diverse needs.

Policies

Parents must take an active role in community planning, advocating for their needs and for those of their children. They must also take responsibility for evaluating the quality of available care options and for making informed decisions about choice of care.

Workplace support through "family friendly" policies is essential, especially for single-parent families. Single-parents were more likely to report child care problems than were two-parent families. To keep these families self-sufficient, it must be possible and feasible for the only parent to work.

Local school policies which permit use of facilities for school-age care programs or support school-run extended day programs improve accessibility and help minimize costs. Policies that permit children to be transported to and from care sites are also important supports. Earlier school starting times help to eliminate the need for before-school care. Educational policies that endorse personal safety instruction for children and child care courses for older youth are additional ways schools can contribute.

Other community organizations can play an active role in supporting school-age child care. They can share some of the responsibility for teaching personal safety skills or child care practices to youth, as well as provide program facilities or a care program itself. Organizations with expertise in parent education can provide information about quality care, keeping in mind parental preferences for videos and written information that were identified by the survey. Local hospitals should consider adopting policies which permit them to offer sick child care, the predominant care problem faced by families.

In the past, training and support for care providers and subsidy programs that make care affordable for limited-income families have been made possible by government policies in support of school-age child care. The survey data reinforces the importance of continuing such policies.

In sum, the need for school-age child care and the issues that surround providing that care are as relevant for families in rural counties as they are for families in more heavily populated areas (Hayes, Palmer, & Zaslow, 1990; Hofferth & Phillips, 1991). Rural families present a range of needs and preferences for care that demand a multiple-resource base, and families, communities, and government each have a role to play in designing a system of care to meet those needs. The definition of roles should be based on local assessments of need.

References

Hayes, C. Palmer, J., & Zaslow, M. (Eds.). (1990). Who cares for America's children? Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Hofferth, S. L. & Phillips, D. A. (1991). Child care policy research. Journal of Social Issues, 47(2), 1-13.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Figure 1

Typical After-School Child Care

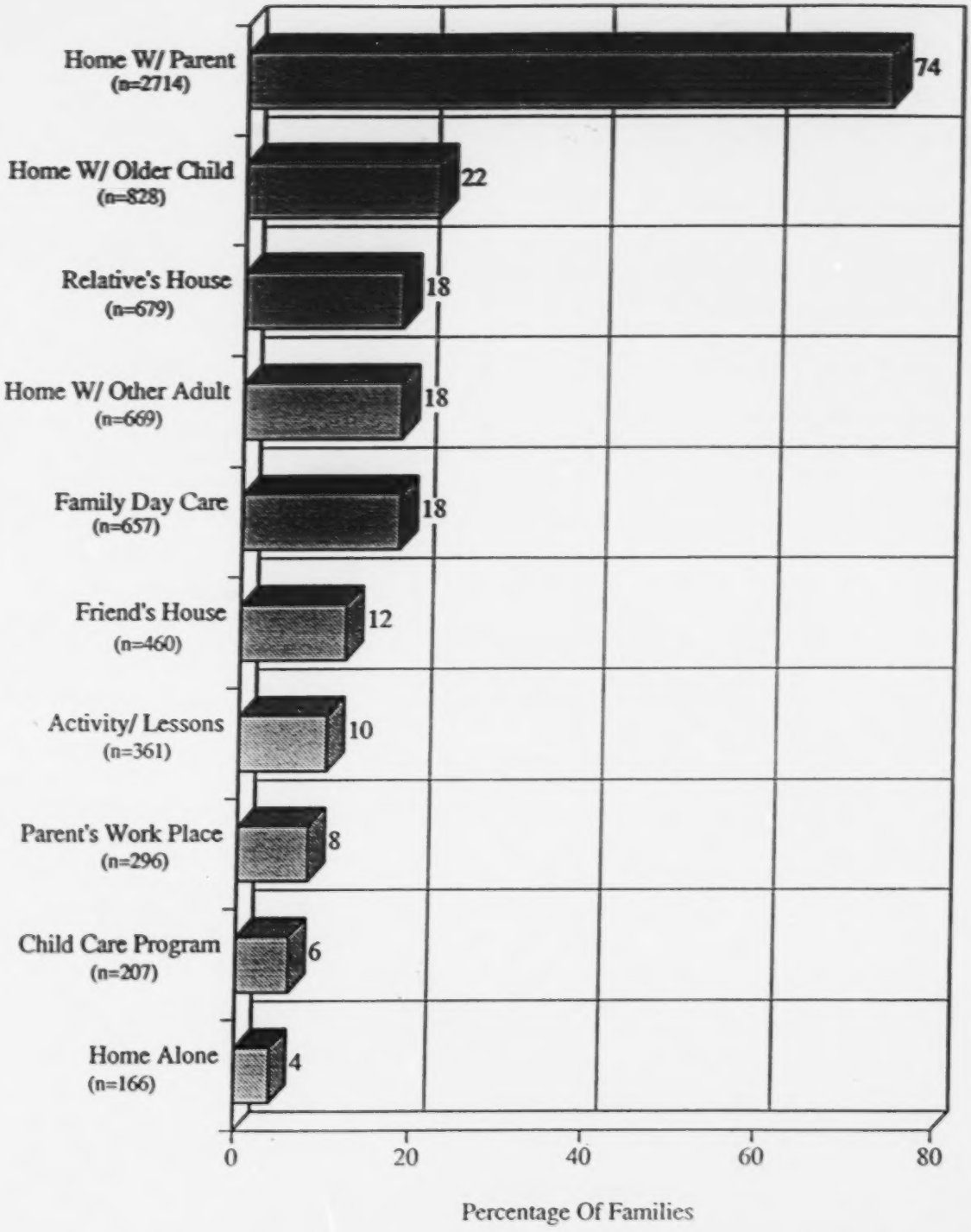


Figure 2

Parents' Problems With School-Age Child Care

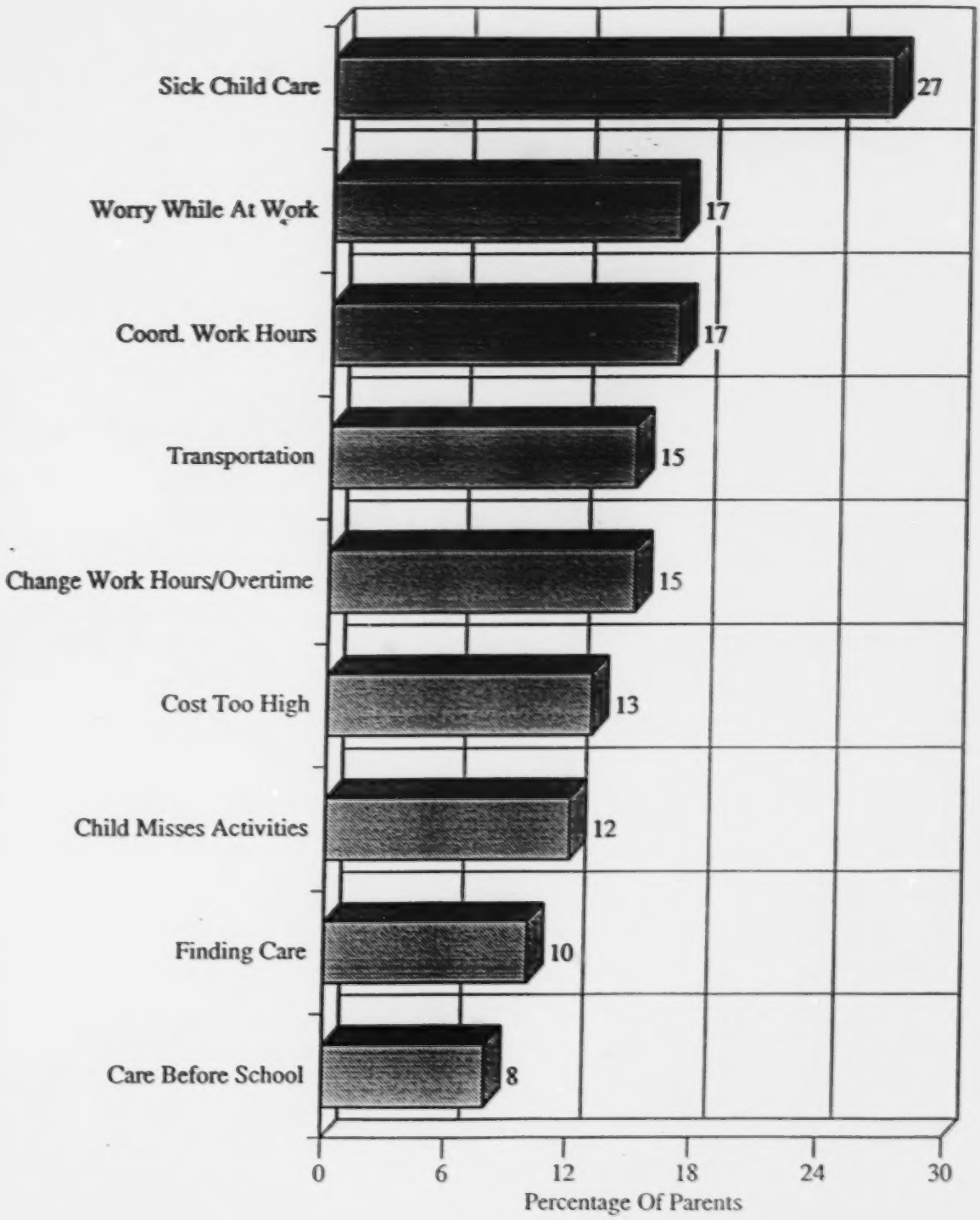


Figure 3

Percentage Of Parents Who Say: "My child needs to know more about ..."

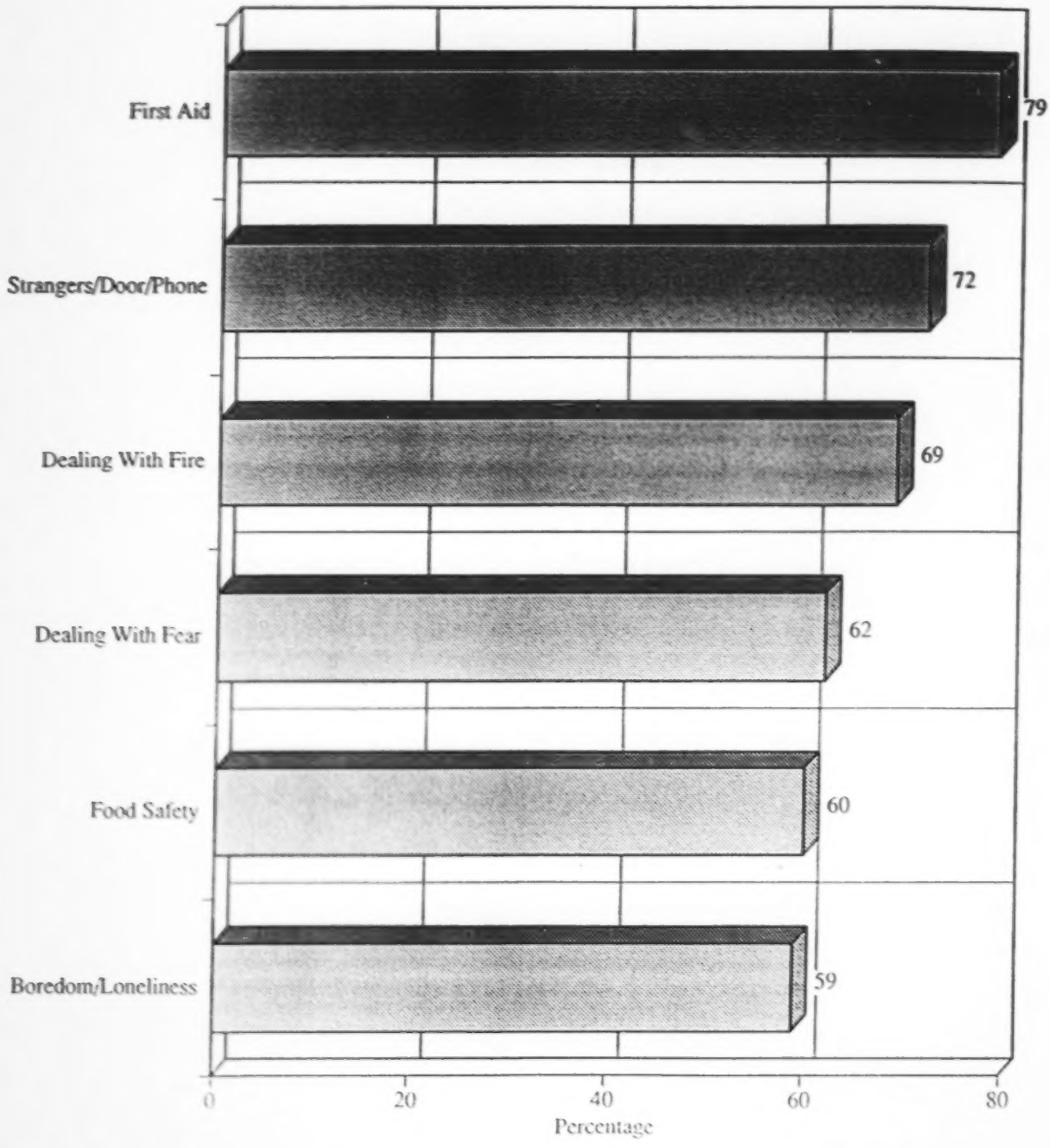


Figure 4

Parent Preferences For Education Programs

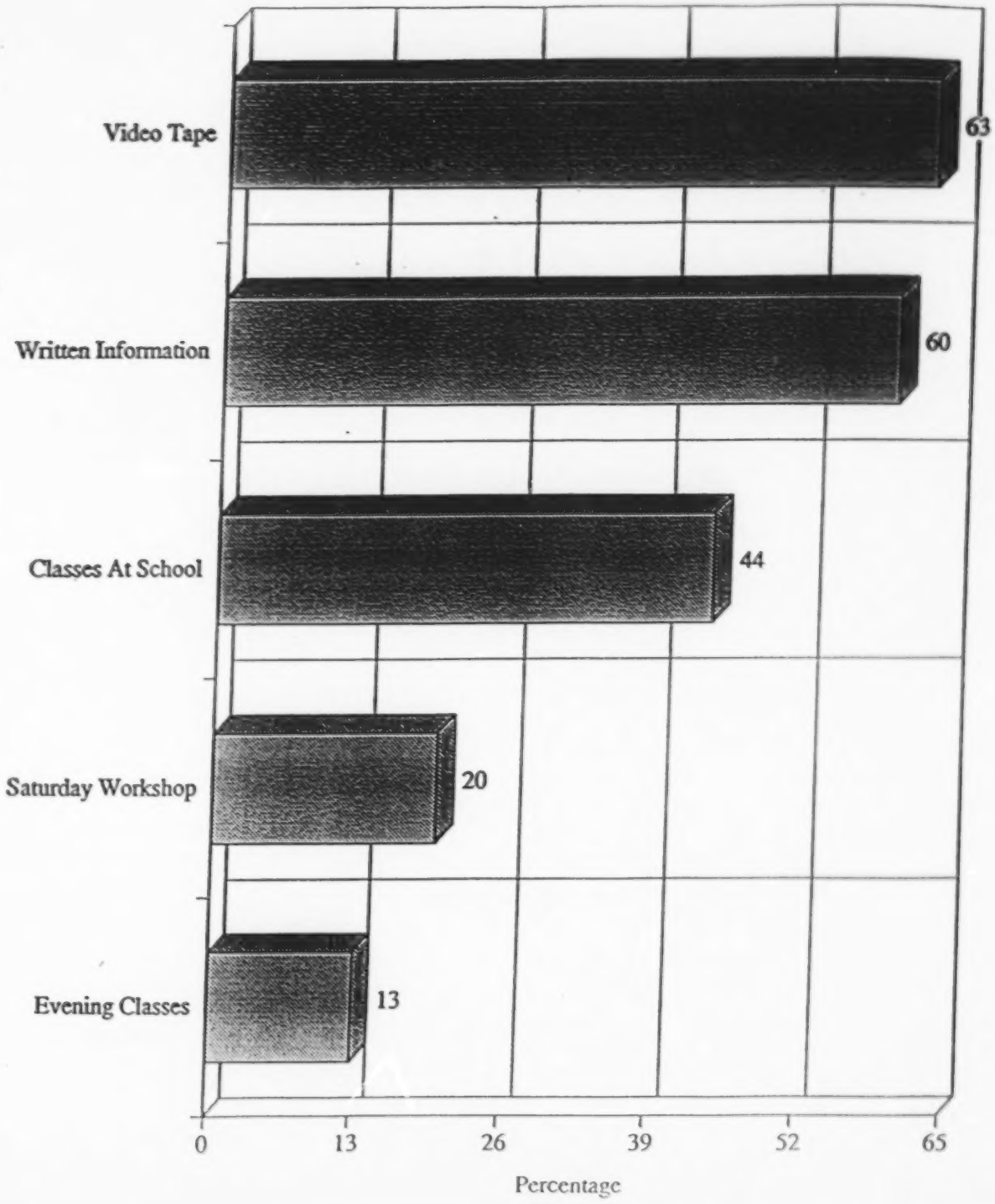
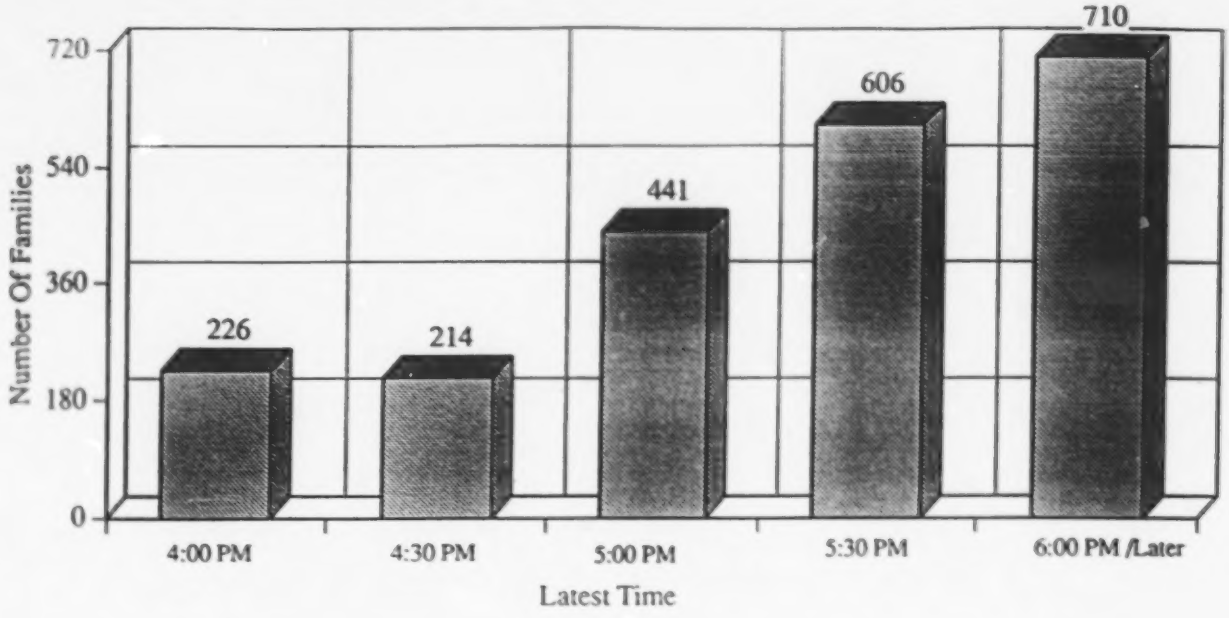


Figure 5

Number Of Families Needing After-School Care By Time Needed



Number Of Families Needing Before-School Care By Time Needed